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ABSTRACT

In order to estimate to what degree the objectives of a training course for special teachers are reached, it is necessary to focus on how the student-special teacher is doing his job before, during, and after training. Both the special school situation and the training situation are involved in the process of evaluation. (Author/SBH)

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EVALUATION IN TRAINING SPECIAL TEACHERS - A UNIVERSAL DILEMMA

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In order to estimate to what amount the objectives of a training course for special teachers are reached, it is necessary to focus on the person of the student-special teacher. The reason is that training objectives in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes only can be realised in the person of the student teacher. Evaluation of the course therefore must be based upon information about the person of the student teacher and his functioning during the courses, and after he has finished the courses. However, in order to gain appropriate information about the student-special teacher's behavior, it is necessary to understand his position. During the course the student-special teacher is functioning as a full-time special teacher. So his position is rather ambivalent: he is not quite a student and at the same time not quite a professional worker; he is a student, but he still has professional responsibility. At each ambivalent situation this position of the student-special teacher can be the starting point of a very creative development. At the same time, however, it makes the training course situation pretty complex. But before focussing on the realization of training objectives in the student-special teacher there is another question that has to be put forward.

This question is related to the training objectives themselves,

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namely: What is the validity of the training objectives? In other words: to what amount are training objectives relevant for a better functioning of the student-special teacher in his working-situation in the school for special education.

When in former times persons had to be prepared for a certain profession or trade, a clear picture of the position and function of this profession or trade was available. So it was not too hard to estimate to what amount a trainee was ready for his job. This was also counting for the training of teachers. The position of teachers in former days was clear and that of school as well.

A relatively stable society in which an invulnerable authority of church and state kept everything neatly in order. But these times are over. Our society is changing in many aspects. A great deal of certainties are lost and a lot of changes within the field of human interactions takes place.

In Holland a lot of changes during the last decade took place in the field of the educational system. As a consequence the position and function of the teacher has changed too.

On the one hand he lost his place upon a pedestal, on the other hand the demands made upon him became more open and personal and also more professional. It seems to be that another kind or type of teacher is needed.

The consequences of this kind of development related to training teachers is stressing the necessity of a continuing reflection about the relevancy and adequacy of the training objectives. Moreover, the training centre must overtly formulate a clear standpoint and vision about education and the underlying value system. For example: What is the position of

special education in the total educational system? How is the relationship between special and regular schools? How must be the balance between didactical and personal values in the learning-teaching situation as derived from objectives formulated in the curriculum of the school?

Opinions and standpoints about these questions decide highly on what happens factual in school and in the particular teaching-learning situations in the classroom. They can decide on admittance policy, on the desirability to build new schools or to change the structure of already existing schools.

The crucial question in this context is who can decide which of these visions or standpoints is correct and the best one. And as a consequence who can decide what training objectives are correct and the best ones. Who knows what are on this level of thinking the correct criteria? This question is not too easy. Because a vision on education implies a vision on human being and human society. These matters are often determined by cultural, religious and personal factors.

Evaluation of training objectives is a universal problem, because educational and training are not mechanical or without personal engagement. Educating is very creative and a highly specific human activity. Cultural obtainings from the past are assimilated as school objectives and are passed on children of today, the adults of tomorrow. Education is essential for the way in which continuum of human existence will be realised. Arriving at this point we can give in and start to sit with folded hands, accepting and doing nothing.

From methodological viewpoint, it seems impossible to decide whether a training course for special teachers makes sense or not. However, this

universal problem is not restricted to training special teachers. In every educational situation, this problem is emerging as a question about value-oriented human behavior. So, we find it again in the working situation of our student-special teachers in school. In the teaching-learning situation with his pupils he is confronted with questions of the same nature as are found in the training situation of himself. However there is often the problem that he is avoiding these fundamental problems by doing just his "practical" job as so often can be heard from so-called "practical" teachers. Too often we are confronted with teachers who just are teaching without fear or favour and just are looking for pragmatical results.

I think that a very fundamental criterion of validity of training objectives can be found in the amount in which student teachers are involved in the process of becoming aware of these questions and of becoming able to recognise the corresponding educational reality in teaching-learning situations. More specifically this means that the student-teacher is going to ask himself questions like: Why do I select these particular objectives for that individual child of this particular category of children? On what basis do I select these educational methods and what is their usefulness? What do I really know about my pupils, about their social background, their cognitive development and the style-aspects of their cognitive functioning? How can I integrate this information in the teaching-learning situation so that my educational approach really makes sense? What is my role in the teaching-learning situation, how do I affect the learning process and do I really start in my interactions with the child where he is now, this very moment? Furthermore, a whole set of questions can be asked about admittance policy and internal and external school differentiation.

Often these hot questions are highly emotionally loaded.

I think that the question about validity of training objectives has to be put on to the student-special teacher himself in order to make him being more open for the complexity of the teaching-learning situations within the social-psychological reference system of the school for special education.

In other words being busy to reflect about what is going on in the training course as to training objectives and training methods, both trainers and student-special teachers have to go hand in hand along a way that leads to more understanding and clarification of teaching-learning situations within the school for special education. The amount to which this starting development will continue in a process of maturation will decide how valid the training course objectives were for this particular student-teacher and how far these objectives were realised in him as a person and as a professional educator. In other words, there is a functional and dynamical interaction between the student-teacher's working situation in the special school and the training situation within the factual training course. The student-teacher's position lies in the very centre of this dynamic process between the two poles of being in school as a teacher and being a student in the training course.

Signals that this desired development in the student teacher is starting can, incidently, be perceived during course activities like guiding situations, social skill training, practical work and even during oral examinations. Sometimes these signals are being confirmed by information from school headmasters, school inspectors and others who advise the school as professional workers

More reliable signals can be found in specific changes in the actual functioning of the student-special teacher in his working situation. These changes are accessible to a more systematical, maybe even scientific, approach. However, in judging the student teacher's functioning, even in describing it, one is in danger of making serious methodological mistakes. One has always to make allowance for the possibilities of the situation in which the student teacher is doing his task. It is very hard judging a particular teacher to distinguish between the teacher himself, his participating in a training course, the school where he is working with his headmasters, colleagues and other professional workers, the children, their parents and the social background.

Another methodological problem is that it is not enough to estimate to what amount a teacher is clever in applying his acquired knowledge and skills. More important is to know with what kind of intentions the teacher is doing his job. Namely how far he is able to relate his educational activities with the child's total existence at this very moment of his total development. Also how far the teacher is aware of his own involvement in the teaching-learning situation, his value-system, his attitude and his own identity. It makes sense that teaching is a process of interaction in which both teacher and pupil can mature in their own identities. To the amount that a training course can contribute to this unfolding maturation in the special school situation, to that amount is that training course valid.

Summary

A student-special teacher has to perform during his training a full-time job as special teacher. What has to be evaluated is how the student-special teacher is doing his job before, during and after his training period. Both the special school situation and the training situation are involved in the process of evaluation.

Some Questions

- The relation between special school objectives and special training objectives;
- the relation between the special teaching situation and the special training situation;
- the relation between special teaching activities and special training activities; and
- how to evaluate the professional behavior of a person who is involved in two reference-systems that are possibly not congruent?

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